Response to Dr. Richard D. St. Germaine's

A CHANCE TO GO FULL CIRCLE: BUILDING ON REFORMS TO CREATE EFFECTIVE LEARNING

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Prepared for the National American Indian and Alaska Native Education Research Agenda Conference
May 30-June 1, 2000
Marriott Hotel and Conference Center
Albuquerque, New Mexico

Analysis:

This response will analyze the position taken by the author in relation to the task established for the paper and, in the **Considerations** section, will pose extensions of this position for further consideration. According to Dr. St. Germaine, the task of this commissioned paper is twofold:

1 The development of a research agenda for Indian education

2 A reflection on the following:

- "The Role of the School Within the Context of American Indian Cultures and Communities Including an Historic Perspective of Schools That Have Served Indian Students"
- "A Description of Their (schools that serve Indian students) Current Role in Indian Communities and the Role They Play in the Lives of Urban Indians"

To determine if the task has been accomplished, we should first agree on the definitions of the variables used. Variables specific to this paper include the use of the terms

"American Indian" and "research." These two terms are fundamental to understanding St. Germaine's response to the task. The term "American Indian" is referenced in the **Introduction** section of the paper.[1] The term "research" is not defined by the author; however, I address a philosophical framework for use of the term in the section **Other Considerations** later in this paper. These variables and some general assumptions are set out by the author through the proposition of guiding questions or by general assumptions based, most likely, on experience.

Examples of guiding questions proposed by the author are:

Is it even appropriate to classify American Indians and Alaska Natives into one American ethnic subculture for the purposes of describing their educational characteristics and needs?[2]

In proposing this rhetorical question, the author understands the implication of the question. In fact, the exigency of the task of this paper requires that the author make the assumption that given what we know and understand about diverse Indian cultures, we still need to move the agenda forward. We must make choices that accept the classification "into one American ethnic subculture" as "their educational characteristics and needs."[3] Choices made in research classifications like this invariably result in a loss of some data; each social scientist makes these choices in defining the variables for research. These choices are no different from any other standard research proposal; the key is to be sure that the definitions are clear and consistent throughout the project.

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[1] Page 1; paragraph 2; American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN) is used inter-changeably with Native American.

[2] Page 1; paragraph 2.

[3] Ibid.

Research projects might be designed appropriately for large data banks where tribally specific designations do not add to the usefulness of the conclusions. In other instances, research projects might be designed more appropriately for a smaller group where tribal differences contribute to the variance in the results and must be reported if the data are to be useful.

A second set of questions proposed are: …*To what extent have tribes or their communities defined the purpose or mission of their school? Have the communities discussed among themselves the 'good life' in a manner that will guide curriculum development? What is it that tribal communities view as important values, cultural norms, and life's goals for the 21st century? …do tribal communities guide or participate in a modification or revision of curricula that accurately reflects the unique academic, vocational, social and personal needs of their children?*[4]

In posing these not-so-rhetorical questions, St. Germaine calls our attention to the requisite need to include tribes, not as communities in the same way that public schools define their constituencies. For this research agenda, *tribal communities* are defined in the legal and sovereign sense that governs policy and is best defined in the legal definitions of Indian preference[5] and Indian Child Welfare.[6] Each tribe's commitment to

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[4] Page 3, paragraph 2

[5] Morton v. Mancari, 417 U.S. 535 (1974). Non-Indian employees of the BIA brought a class action claiming that the employment preference for qualified Indians in the BIA provided by the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 contravened the anti-discrimination provisions of the Equal Employment Opportunities Act of 1972, and deprived them of property rights without due process of law in violation of the Fifth Amendment. The Supreme Court held that Indian preference does not constitute invidious racial discrimination but is reasonable and rationally designed to further self-determination.

[6] P. L. 95-608. Indian Child Welfare Act. This law establishes minimum standards for placement of American Indian children in foster care and adoptive homes and is designed to stop the unwarranted practices of governmental and private agencies removing Indian children from their families and tribes. The intent of ICWA was to protect the best interest of the American Indian child and to preserve the security of Indian tribes and to re-establish tribal authority over all tribal children.

self-determination will impact a national research agenda through tribally established protocols, as well as, the tribe's need for quantitative data driven decision-making.

St. Germaine poses the following questions about the inclusion of culture and tradition in Indian schools: *"….have enough adults committed themselves to re-teaching the important traditions in a manner that will sustain it(the tradition) well into the 21st century?"* He continues by asking *"is there utility and function for these dying (Native) languages?"*[7]

These two questions pose philosophical questions about culture that make assumptions regarding the ability of tribes and, ultimately schools, to sustain and/or regain the values and traditions through targeted social change strategies that would reintroduce the culture to generations of students who feel disconnected. In an article published in this week's *The Nation* magazine, an urban Indian student is quoted as saying **"We're not even Indians anymore."** [8] Essentially, in this paper, St. Germaine has hit on the same central issue for the need to support a quality research agenda.

Examples of assumptions, most likely based on experience would be the following: *Urban AI/AN communities face concerns similar to those experienced on-reservation, but urban concerns are often exacerbated by the overwhelming proximity to non-Native people.*[9]

Again, the author begins to direct our attention to the vastness of the problem posed in prioritizing a national research agenda for Indian education. These questions,

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[7] Page 3, paragraph 2

[8] Brian Thomas Gallager. Teaching (Native) America. *The Nation.* June 5, 2000. 36-38.

[9] Page 1; paragraph 3

derived from our own experiences and those of other scholars, are valid. As the basis for asking questions, our experiences allow us to understand our culture in the context of the 21st century and these experiences validate our own traditions, where experience is highly valued in teaching and learning.

St. Germaine's own experiences with the impact of popular media allow him to discuss social changes in Indian Country. In emphasizing social change, the author characterizes television as the new tribal culture in the following statement: *"The impact of television has dramatically modified the value system of AI/AN communities, so much so that Cable TV seems to be finishing the work of Custer."*[10] The subsequent discussion of the impact of television is one of the better justifications regarding the need for research in Indian education. Each of the studies referenced in his argument on mainstream programming used an "American child" to represent the impact in Indian country. This is a result of the fact that there are relatively few **research** studies on American Indian/Alaska Native students. The determinants of this conclusion are outlined in the final section of this paper.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF INDIAN EDUCATION

St. Germaine makes the point that in the 1930s the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) and public schools served a similar number of Indian students.[11] Since the 1950's, however, these numbers changed dramatically, primarily as a result of the federal government's removal of American Indians--this time to urban areas where jobs

[10] Page 4, paragraph 4

[11] Page 6, paragraph 3

purportedly could be found.[12] His review of the reform efforts in recent years targets efforts of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and its Effective Schools programming—Bureau Effective Schools Teams (BEST).

At this point the paper appears to move away from its original task in the most dramatic fashion. Pages nine through eleven discuss the BIA's efforts in some detail and are useful in understanding reform efforts that targeted BIA funded schools. However, the best estimates of the numbers of students served by BIA funded schools is less than l5% of the total number of identified American Indian/Alaska Native students of school age (See Figure 1; estimated per cent for rural, reservation area). The original task, which includes contextualizing urban Indian education is hampered by the lack of reliable data and would require the author to explore school districts' data banks—an impossible task given the time constraints of this project. It does, however, point out the need for access to data points; these data points require new strategies for collection.

Conclusion

The task proposed as the initial outline of this paper is complex and is restricted by the fact that the author is forced to attempt the task without access to research efforts which would support the points he wishes to make. This is clearly the best argument for a sustained, meaningful research agenda in Indian education. In the conclusion, St. Germaine addresses issues to be targeted in a national research agenda. He does this by reviewing the most recent research and reviews of research. The fact that this review can be summarized in the work of the Indian Nations' at Risk Task Force report, Demmert,

[12] Lee Francis. *Native Time: An Historical Timeline of Native America*. (New York: St. Martins Griffin, 1996), 296. In 1952, The Voluntary Relocation Program was implemented by the BIA. American Indians were moved to large urban areas, e.g. Oakland, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Denver and Chicago.

Deyhle, Swisher, and Tippeconnic implies that the number of research studies is scant. Compared to research studies on minority issues defined as multicultural education, bilingual education, language acquisition, learning strategies for minorities, or policy, Indian education **research** studies are nearly non-existent.

Other Considerations

Definitions

Of primary importance in defining a research agenda for schools serving Indian students is this fundamental question: *How do we define research?* Until this question is addressed, Indian people will be forced to define research with the same political biases that govern research practices in mainstream education. It is without question that oral tradition and storytelling are central to our cultures and our worldview. In mainstream educational research, oral traditions might be called qualitative research and may be legitimized by structure, perspective, and context. The converse is also true: Oral traditions may be dismissed as not representative, as being too intuitive or general or as lacking in scope. We must be prepared to define research on our own terms so that it is useful to the task at hand.

In tandem to this question, we need to be prepared to foster research capabilities among American Indian scholars and students so that the products they produce are well grounded in the appropriate pedagogical theory and represent an understanding of the culture, as well as, sampling techniques and statistical theory. In statistical terms, the BIA funded schools present a unique opportunity for convenience sampling, assuming that tribes have institutional research protocol in place to allow for student research. But as most social scientists will point out, convenience sampling skips several of the steps

necessary for assuring that the questions we pose are the ones for which we collect data to get the answers. Common sampling mistakes include changing the sampling procedure in order to make the data collection more convenient for the schools involved.[13] It is a mistake to assume that because you can collect data that it is necessarily meaningful to your research. When such a convenience sample is used, the researcher must acknowledge the limitations of the sample and not attempt to generalize the results beyond the given population pool.[14] Further, such convenience, while solving a short-term problem, fails to address the need for research on students in non-BIA funded schools—the clear majority of students in this country. Long-term strategies including the recognition and understanding that most of the Indian children in this country are no longer in BIA funded schools are needed.

Even the vocabulary to discuss these children is missing. I say this because BIA funded schools and urban schools with large numbers of Indian students are not discrete categories and are not inclusive. There are rural schools in some states, for example in Oklahoma, where Indian students attend public schools. There are states where large numbers of students are in suburban areas and small cities. In many of these communities, parents wish their children to understand their connection to Indian country and struggle to ensure that opportunities are provided. These areas are perfect for original inquiry. Enrollment patterns can be conceptualized as a continuum from rural reservation areas to large urban centers, with differing types of enrollment patterns (based on numbers) throughout. For example:

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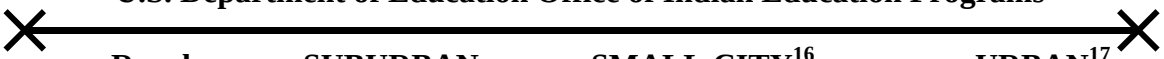
[13] Walter A. Borg and Meredith Gall. *Educational Research.* (NY: Longman, 1989), 241.

[14] Donna Mertens. Research Methods in Education and Psychology: Integrating Diversity with Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), 265.

Figure 1
Estimated Student Count 1999-2000
U.S. Department of Education Office of Indian Education Programs[15]



Rural Reservation		SUBURBAN Non-Reservation	SMALL CITY[16]	URBAN[17]
4%	11%	36%	18%	31%

Within this framework, research efforts historically have targeted rural, reservation communities. This is true for curricular, language-intensive research. Efforts of the Urban Indian Education Research Center located in Milwaukee, WI[18] are designed to focus on the extreme right characterized in Figure 1; but clearly Indian children in other public schools need to be part of our efforts. American Indians do not live on reserve or trust land, but live in areas where they are even more likely to be a *deminimus* population from a cultural perspective. We must acknowledge the sovereign status of tribal governments with the responsibility for *all* tribal children. Acknowledging this fact, however, does not release us from recognition that our own culture defines us as tribal members first and as such further defines us as a political entity. Indian leaders while focusing on the immediate issues surrounding the political boundaries of their tribe must remain aware of their obligations to their own children specifically, and to American Indian children generally, in their daily decision-making. Our research efforts need to be cohesive and practical.

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[15] Electronic Mail Correspondence with R. Byington, June 2000.

[16] Small City defined as less than 100,000

[17] Urban defined as 100K or more

[18] See www.ics-milw.org